



POLLY SINGER

Couture Hats

Fabulous and fanciful chapeaus for afternoon tea and beyond

Text by Katherine Cloninger Ellis | Photography Courtesy of Polly Singer

After a successful career working in the music industry in New York City and a gentle nudge from a dear friend, Polly Singer knew it was time to return to what she loved most—working with her hands and creating beautiful things for others to cherish. Pursuing fashion seemed natural to Polly, as she always appreciated meticulous craftsmanship, and so she enrolled in classes at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT). There she became interested in the artistry of millinery, and for a Kentucky girl with big dreams and an eye for beauty, it almost seemed serendipitous.

In 1998, after graduating from FIT and interning with Patricia Underwood, a famed hatmaker in New York, Polly moved back to the Bluegrass State and rekindled

her love for The Kentucky Derby, both the sport and the traditional pageantry. A few years later, she launched her couture hat business online, and the rest is history.

"I didn't think anyone was going to purchase these hats online, since it's such a personal item," Polly remarks. But to her surprise, the stunning creations spoke for themselves. The vibrant colors and attention to detail jumped off the page, so to speak, and orders started trickling in. It wasn't until 2011, however, that she felt like her business really exploded. "Things truly changed with the Duke and Duchess' wedding," Polly notes. "People were more into fascinators and saucer hats and, ultimately, British style in general. The saucers and fascinators have become more mainstream because of the royals."



(Left) The “Christy” is a vibrant royal blue upturned cloche inspired by *Downton Abbey*. (Middle) The “Hannah” is a brown wool hand-blocked fedora named after Jewish poet, Hannah Szenes. (Bottom) The “Christina” is a statement-making oversized fedora adorned with gorgeous feathers and is perfect for a fall event.



In any given year, and remarkably in 2020 as well, Polly designs anywhere from 50 to 200 custom hats for clients. After meeting a new client, the first step in the process is to properly evaluate the client’s desires, personal style, and where the headpiece might be worn. “I use the Singer Method, which is part fashion/part personality assessment to choose the right hat for you,” Polly says proudly.

Next, the base of the hat must be created, which is determined by the type and size of the hat requested—fascinator, saucer hat, Kentucky Derby-style hat, etc. Some hats can require one to five hours of work, while fascinators tend to be much faster, due to their smaller size. Lastly, comes the fun part of adorning the hat with eye-catching elements, from feathers to lace to florals, that truly take the accessory from ordinary to over-the-top, in the best way. “I have to go to five different stores to get all of the supplies,” Polly explains. “I don’t produce a lot of one particular thing, because I don’t know what people are going to buy. It’s a constant pivot, and it makes it interesting.”

Whether in search of a classic chapeau that resembles Audrey Hepburn’s iconic ensemble in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* or, perhaps, something more modern or colorful, Polly Singer has it covered with not only elegant, statement-making hats, but also helpful advice on what to pair with your fabulous chapeau. From afternoon teas, milestone birthday parties, and special church events to bridal and baby showers, weddings, and, of course, the Kentucky Derby, Polly has fine-tuned the art of effortlessly complementing a stylish wardrobe with a picture-perfect hat. Here are some of her tips and tricks to sporting a couture hat with confidence:



Indoor Event: Don a hat that’s a bit smaller in size to appropriately fit the space. A large hat with a wide brim is uncomfortable to wear when sitting at a cramped table. Polly recommends wearing a cloche—specifically, a vintage profile cloche—fascinator, or saucer hat for this type of occasion. If you are drinking tea, avoid anything with veiling, because it will prohibit sipping the beverage.

Outdoor Event: Choose a larger hat with a bigger brim for both sun protection and a beautiful, romantic look. If you’re sitting outside on a warm summer day, you can wear a hat with a 5- to 6-inch brim. Personalize your hat by adding a lovely scarf, a vintage pin or jewelry, and/or fresh flowers, which can be secured with floral tape and a pin.



Proper Attire: Balance is key. If you're wearing a floral dress, a simpler hat would be appropriate. Choose a hat that pulls in a few of the pretty colors from the dress. If a vibrant print is more your style, Polly suggests picking a hat with minimal or no flowers to not compete with the outfit. Less is always more when it comes to accessorizing.

The easiest way to incorporate a magnificent hat into your ensemble is to select a solid color for your outfit. Pink and royal blue are most universally flattering and work well for pairing purposes. You can do a lot more with your hat or fascinator without a competing print, and you can properly show off your beautiful and colorful creation with lots of pizzazz.

Sustainability and Affordability: When purchasing a designer hat or fascinator for the first time, choose one that is highly versatile and can be utilized for various events. At Polly Singer Couture Hats, all of the adornments are sewn on to be adaptable for later use. Clients often return to Polly to re-trim a hat with a different pop of color to coordinate with a particular outfit for an upcoming occasion. Additional add-ons, such as feathers, flowers, ribbons, and pins, can be easily swapped out to produce a hat that looks brand-new but without the expense of buying an entirely new accessory.

With this sage advice and an extraordinary hat, you'll be receiving endless compliments at your next sophisticated gathering, and Polly Singer will be to thank for that. Big dreams and immense talent have paved the way for the Georgetown, Kentucky, native to follow her passion and improve the lives of women one fabulous hat at a time. 🍷

Polly Singer Couture Hats can be purchased on the company website at hatsandveils.net or by phone at 859-533-1426.



(Upper left) The "Dawn," inspired by Lady Mary of Downton Abbey, is an upturned hat blocked in navy blue wool felt and trimmed with a feather mount with hand-curved peacock feathers. (Above) The "Diana" is an elegant hat bedecked with neutral-colored flowers and pretty feathers for a dramatic look. (Below) The "Yuko En" is a classic hand-blocked hat made from parisial straw and named after the Japanese garden in central Kentucky.

